DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 832 EA 029 985

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TITLE W.W.II and the Great Gender Realignment of School Administration.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19-23, 1999).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Characteristics; *Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Instructional Leadership; Sex Bias; *Sex Stereotypes; Superintendents; *Women Administrators
IDENTIFIERS Gender Issues

ABSTRACT

The so-called "Golden Age" of women school administrators, that period from 1919 to 1950 when women held around 25 percent of county superintendencies and 10 percent of all superintendencies is contrasted to post-World War II conditions--a period during which a gender realignment in school administration occurred. Following the U.S. Civil War, county superintendencies west of the Mississippi River flourished; accompanying this expansion was a rise in the number of female county superintendents, a condition paralleled by women's attainment of other school administrative positions. However, after WWII, school administration experienced a significant period of restructuring that reaffirmed the masculine identification of the work, caused in part by schools' aggressive campaign to find employment for millions of returning veterans. These veterans, aided by the GI Bill, gained an advantage when graduate education for school administrators became an important component of school administrators' qualifications. School boards also began to look for decidedly masculine traits among male applicants to counteract the widespread fear that homosexuals occupied educational positions. The number of women county superintendents dropped from 718 in 1950 to 366 in 1970, while, at the same time, a type of hypermasculinity became associated with the superintendency. (RJM)

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A paper presented at the 1999 Annual Meeting
of the American Educational Research Association
Montreal, Quebec

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W.W.II and the Great Gender Realignment of School Administration

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From the start school administration was structured as a male domain.[1] The early decades of the twentieth century, however, brought a challenge to this gender-restricted work as an unprecedented number of women attained school administrative positions.[2] From 1910 through 1950, women held around a quarter of county superintendencies and ten percent of all superintendencies, for example.[3]

In a shift that has received little critical attention, however, women's collective ascent into school administration was abruptly interrupted by W.W.II and its aftermath. During the twenty-five years following Allied victory, the work of school administration was re-defined as a masculine province. Women virtually disappeared from the ranks of school administrators, as a result, and have made only slight progress into the present.

This paper briefly outlines the contexts of what Hansot and Tyack have called the "Golden Age" of women school administrators. Then it contrasts this short-lived era with post-war conditions that effectively contributed to a gender realignment in school administration.

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1 David Tyack, The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

2 Elisabeth Hansot and David Tyack, "The Dream Deferred: A Golden Age for Women School Administrators," Policy Paper No. 81-C2 (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance).

3 Jackie M. Blount, Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency, 1873-1995 (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

Though women have never held the majority of school leadership positions, in the early decades of the twentieth century their numbers increased impressively – and some hoped or feared that women eventually would dominate school administration just as they had school teaching. Though a few women such as Ella Flagg Young of Chicago and Susan Dorsey of Los Angeles won prominent urban superintendencies during this time, most of the women who became superintendents did so in far less glamorous Midwestern and Western county school districts.

County superintendencies west of the Mississippi flourished in the decades after the Civil War. These positions originally were created to help state school superintendents distribute proceeds from the sale of state school land, to settle school district boundary disputes, and also to assist with implementing state school laws. Most county superintendencies were elected positions because it was believed that matters as contentious as district border disputes needed to be settled by persons accountable to the electorate. The county superintendents were poorly paid. In exchange for their meager wages, they traveled extensively to far-flung schoolhouses and administered teacher training institutes, among many other duties. In all, the work of the county superintendent was difficult by any measure, and the poor pay virtually guaranteed that few would be willing to take on the work.

As county superintendent positions opened up, several other changes occurred in schoolwork to facilitate the rise of the female county superintendent. First, schoolteaching experienced a notable decline in the number and percentage of male

teachers. When women first began entering the work, the number of schoolmasters fell steadily for a number of well-documented reasons.[4] However, after the Civil War, the number of male teachers plummeted. At the same time, women stormed into the work of schoolteaching. In a number of schools and districts in the western half of the continent, there were no male teachers to be found by the early 1900s. Closely associated with the rise of the woman schoolteacher was the enormous growth of the women's suffrage movement that effectively supported and encouraged women to run for public offices, including school superintendencies. In sum, with fewer male educators who could be promoted into county superintendencies, more females educators who might aspire to the positions, and a large social movement that promoted the political enfranchisement and power of women, conditions around the turn-of-the-century were ripe for women to move into formal school leadership positions.

In fact, from the late 1800s through the 1930s, women experienced enormous success in attaining county superintendencies. According to the Report of the Commissioner of Education, women held 228 county superintendencies in 1896 and then 288 in 1901.[5] The Woman Suffrage Yearbook documented 495 women county

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[4] Among the many examples of scholarship on this topic are Myra Strober and David Tyack, "Why Do Women Teach and Men Manage? A Report on Research on Schools," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 5, 3 (1980): 494-503; Thomas Morain, "The Departure of Males from the Teaching Profession in Nineteenth-Century Iowa," Civil War History 26 (June 1980): 161-70; and John Rury, "Who Became Teachers? The Social Characteristics of Teachers in American History," in American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work, ed. Donald Warren (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 9-48.

[5] Report of the Commissioner of Education 1900-1909, 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), 1228-229.

superintendents in 1913.[6] And my own statistical study shows that some 862 women held these positions in 1930, accounting for roughly twenty-seven percent of all county superintendents.[7] This rapid and noteworthy growth was also paralleled by women's attainment of other kinds of school administrative positions such as state superintendencies, elementary school principalships, district supervisory positions, and assistant superintendencies. For the most part, however, women could not move into the very highest administrative positions unless there were no men employed by the school, district, or system who might find themselves in positions subservient to women.

Women continued to make impressive gains in school leadership until around W.W.II. Then after the war, school administration experienced a significant period of restructuring that reaffirmed the masculine identification of the work once again. A number of complex factors contributed to this shift.

To begin with, schools launched aggressive campaigns to recruit men for the classroom. The war's end had brought the return of millions of veterans looking for civilian employment. Then there was a shortage of qualified teachers because the baby boom had enlarged school enrollments around the country. Also, many women who had taught previously had abandoned the classroom during the war to work in more lucrative military-related industrial jobs – and few returned to teaching in peacetime. Both the post-war shortage of teachers and the enormous veteran unemployment rate, then, were

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[6] The Woman Suffrage Yearbook, 1917 (New York: National Woman Suffrage Publishing, 1917), 166.

[7] Blount, Destined, 181.

problems that many thought could be solved simultaneously by encouraging veterans to teach. Even though jobs were at a premium, however, few men wanted to work in a woman's field. So school districts resolved this difficulty by recruiting veterans to the toils of the classroom with the promise that they would receive rapid promotion to school administration.[8]

The post-war years also brought a major change in the way that persons moved into school administrative work. Previously, it was not uncommon for teachers to work their way up into administration, rising through the ranks in their districts as their experience and merit afforded. After the war, however, the relatively new University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) pushed for the creation of graduate-level credentialling programs in school administration. Instead of rising through the ranks, school administrators increasingly needed to obtain post-baccalaureate credentials from a rapidly expanding roster of educational administration preparation programs around the country. Some of these credentialling programs did not admit women. Many of the ones that did set low quotas on the number of women who could be admitted, at least in part so that the slots could go to veterans.[9]

One of the most significant advantages that men enjoyed in these credentialling programs, though, is that the federal government provided generous scholarship money in the form of G.I. Bill benefits. Since few women were permitted military employment

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[8] A. Barter (1959) "The status of women in school administration," Education Digest 25 (October, 1959): 40-41.

[9] H. Davis and A. Samuelson, "Women in Education," The Journal of Social Issues 6, 3 (1950): 32-34.

during the war, the overwhelming majority of persons qualified to receive G.I. Bill education benefits were men. As school administration increasingly required graduate study, the majority of students paid for it with the G.I. Bill. As evidence, a 1971 survey conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) indicated that nearly seventy percent of all superintendents who served that year had been assisted in their studies by the G.I. Bill.[10]

To make it more worthwhile for men to enter graduate educational administration credentialling programs in the first place, candidates increasingly demanded executive compensation and status. Small school districts found it especially difficult to provide high enough salaries to attract desirable candidates. At least in part to deal with this problem, school administrators lobbied for consolidation, both at the school and district levels. Theoretically, if small school districts consolidated into larger ones, their tax bases would increase notably -- making it easier to offer lucrative administrative salaries.[11] In discussing the benefits of consolidation for the school principalship, one professor of educational administration explained that "consolidation is making a school large enough to hold positions that are attractive to males."[12] As a result, administrative salaries during

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[10] S. Knezevich (ed.), The American School Superintendent: An AASA Research Study (Washington, DC: American Association of School Administrators, 1971), 25-27, 48.

[11] R. Campbell, "The superintendent -- His role and professional status," in C. Nolte (ed.), An Introduction to School Administration: Selected Readings (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 315-317.

[12] C. Broadhead, J. Heald, S. Hecker, D. Leu, and C. Rudman, "The woman principal -- Going the way of the buffalo?" The National Elementary Principal, 45, 5 (1966): 6-11.

these years increased. Many of the women who held school superintendencies and principalships after the war lost their positions when schools and districts consolidated.[13]

On their way up to school administrative positions, men not only needed graduate credentials as well as aspirations for executive status, but they also had to demonstrate their masculinity to the school board members who might hire them. Around the turn of the century, boards typically refrained from hiring the men who applied for teaching positions because men who wanted to serve in "women's work" were not thought to be manly enough. They were regarded as somewhat effeminate and therefore as poor role models for young males. After W.W.II, however, effeminate men also were thought to be homosexual, the term then used to describe gay men and lesbians.

Homosexuality had become a topic of heated public discussion in the years following the war. During the war, when confined to the largely homosocial military realm, soldiers often engaged in same-sex sexual conduct. This frequently occurred even among men who otherwise identified as heterosexual. Although some branches of the military began screening recruits for homosexuality in 1943, the screenings were easy to circumvent and recruiters, anxious to keep their numbers up, did not pursue the matter with much urgency. After the war, however, the military began searching for ways to trim the ranks. They aggressively scrutinized soldiers for evidence of homosexuality, purging anyone who seemed suspicious.[14] Then in 1948 when Kinsey's widely-read and much-discussed work, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, was published, the public learned

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[13] Blount, Destined, 122-24.

[14] A. Bérubé, Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two (New York: Penguin, 1990).

that the incidence of homosexuality among men was much higher than had been thought previously. While many found these results enlightening and worthy of broad discussion, others were horrified and immediately began finding ways to combat the perceived homosexual menace. Senator McCarthy responded by launching a congressional investigation to identify and root out any homosexuals in government employment.[15] Drawing on the sensational attention of McCarthy's investigation, state governments around the country followed suit and scoured their offices for suspected homosexuals.[16]

Schools were not immune. Yellow journalists reported that cells of homosexual teachers were recruiting from among the nation's public school students.[17] Also, it was popularly thought that homosexual men and women were disproportionately drawn to particular professions, one of which was teaching.[18] It therefore became a matter of public concern to scrutinize the ranks of teachers carefully to identify homosexuals. One popular means of screening male candidates was to look for effeminacy. Effeminacy was thought to be nearly conclusive proof of homosexuality because, as one psychologist explained, homosexuals "produce an aura of effeminacy so subtle that it is very difficult to describe," yet "the fact that it exists... accounts for the uncanny facility homosexual men

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[15] R. Rich, "Perverts in federal agencies called peril to United States security," Congressional Record, 81st Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), Appendix 7755.

[16] Florida Legislative Committee, Homosexuality and Citizenship in Florida: A Report (Tallahassee, FL: Florida Legislative Committee, 1964).

[17] A. Berubé, and J. D'Emilio, "The Military and Lesbians during the McCarthy Years," Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society 9, 2 (1984): 759-775.

[18] A. Gross, Strangers in Our Midst: Problems of the Homosexual in American Society (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1962), 151.

have in recognizing each other, usually instantaneously, even though they may be total strangers."[19]

To be selected for teaching positions, then, men increasingly needed to demonstrate their manliness – and administrative candidates were held to an even higher standard of masculinity. A writer for the American School Board Journal in 1946 described the characteristics that made one successful superintendent candidate so desirable: "The man selected could not be labeled as an effeminate being. He was a former collegiate athletic hero. His physique was comparable to any of the mythical Greek gods. He was truly the ultimate in manliness." And, in fact, men increasingly were expected to have proven their manliness by having participated in and coached school athletics. A report produced by the AASA in 1971 proudly indicated that of all the superintendents serving at that time, eighty percent had coached school sports before moving into administration.[20]

Marriage also came to be important proof of masculinity. The American School Board Journal author above went on to explain the criteria for choosing the perfect school superintendent: "The last, but not least in importance of his personal characteristics, was the fact that he was married."[21] In fact, marriage was considered such an important demonstration of masculinity and therefore a prerequisite for assuming school

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[19] C. Hewitt, "On the Meaning of Effeminacy in Homosexual Men," American Journal of Psychotherapy 15, 4 (1961): 595.

[20] AASA Commission on the Preparation of Professional School Administrators, The American School Superintendent: An AASA Research Study, ed. Stephen J. Knezevich (Washington, DC: American Association of School Administrators, 1971), 25-27-48.

[21] V. Leonard, "No Man's Land," American School Board Journal (September, 1946): 21-22.

superintendencies that a 1947 article in the American School Board Journal cautioned, "The unmarried superintendent is an enigma to school boards." The author explained that "a young bachelor will be tolerated, but an older man who stubbornly refuses to enter the conjugal state receives little sympathy or consideration. A bachelor is considered 'odd' or 'peculiar,' vain, selfish, and even a delinquent member of society."[22] At the time, the terms "odd" and "peculiar" (especially when wrapped by quotation marks) were sometimes used as code words for "homosexual" in polite conversation. Not coincidentally, during these years the marriage rates of male administrators were notably higher than those for men in the general workforce.[23] Marriage, then, had become evidence of heterosexuality and it therefore served as one of an increasing number of masculine prerequisites for service in educational administration.

Not only had school administration been reaffirmed as a masculine domain, but only a few men -- those nearly like Greek gods, approaching the ultimate in manliness, need apply. This exaggerated concern about the masculinity of school administrators was undoubtedly a compensation for the public's perception of a lack of manliness of male educators. In the end, however, it drove conventional gender-identified roles in schoolwork to polar extremes.

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[22] L. Zeliff, "Bachelor or Married Man as Small-Town Superintendent?" American School Board Journal (September, 1947): 53, 86.

[23] C. Feistritzer, Profile of School Administrators in the United States (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Educational Information, 1988), 17.

As school superintendencies – and school administration in general – were reaffirmed as masculine realms after W.W.II, the work became increasingly problematic for women. For one thing, women who aspired to administrative work were viewed as transgressing their gender-appropriate bounds and thus were stigmatized. For another, if women chose to affirm their femininity as it was constructed at the time, they were regarded as unprofessional and certainly not fitting school administrators. As schoolwork became highly gender polarized during the decades following W.W.II, then, women enjoyed fewer means of attaining top administrative positions, or if – however improbably – they were selected, they found it increasingly difficult to maintain the respect of their colleagues.

In the decades following W.W.II, the proportion of school administrators fell rapidly. My study of women superintendents shows that the number of women county superintendents dropped from 718 in 1950 (twenty-three percent) to 366 in 1970 (fourteen percent). Similarly, women in all kinds of superintendencies combined plummeted from 9 percent in 1950 to just over 3 percent in 1970.[24] And in 1965, the National Council of Administrative Women in Education reported that there was also a rapid decline in the number of women elementary school principals, accounting for fifty-six percent in 1950 and then dropping to only 4 percent by 1960.[25] Clearly, there was a significant shakeup in the gender make-up of school administration around the country.

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[24] Blount, Destined, 181.

[25] National Council of Administrative Women in Education, "Needed: More Women in School Administration," Senior Scholastic Teachers' Edition 86 (April 8, 1965):1.

In recent years, a number of scholars of school administration have described quite capably how the configuration of post-W.W.II school leadership has put women in a double-bind – where they are punished for leading with a masculine demeanor, and they are discouraged from entering the work if they portray a feminine one. This double-bind has played out in a nearly endless series of permutations, each of which essentially has made it difficult for women aspiring to this masculine-identified work.[26]

It is quite important to understand well how women – and people who are in some manner perceived as effeminate – are held back in school administration. The means of oppression, both complex and simple, overt and subtle, must be understood thoroughly. The particular vision of masculinity that largely shaped school administration following W.W.II was a very narrow one into which only a few men could fit. In a sense, then, it not only has necessarily held women back, but it also has held back many men – those who have deviated from this narrow vision of masculinity. As I have argued in this paper, it is necessary to look at masculinities, particularly idealized versions, and to examine their role in the shaping of schoolwork.

In the end, it is conceivably possible that school administration was configured as a hyper-masculine realm first, and then the gendered implications for the rest of schoolwork followed as a consequence. Those who restructured school administrative work after W.W.II may not have intended first and foremost to keep women out of school

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[26] Catherine Marshall has documented this double-bind extensively in her cumulative body of work including The Assistant Principal: Leadership Choices and Challenges (Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press, 1992). Other scholars who have described and analyzed these conditions are Charol Shakeshaft, Margaret Grogan, Susan Chase, Colleen Bell, Sandra Gupton, Cryss Brunner, Patricia Schmuck, Flora Ida Ortiz, and Marilyn Tallerico.

leadership, but rather, it is plausible to suggest that they wanted above all to protect their own masculine image. For this reason, I argue that it is essential that we now turn our attention to understanding the role of masculinity in shaping schoolwork, particularly school administration.